DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 307 882 IR 052 770

AUTHOR Arnold, Judith; Zyzik, Ursula
TITLE Using PRO-SEARCH To Enhance an Online Searching Service: One Library's Experience.
PUB DATE May 88
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Session of the Annual Meeting of the Illinois Library Association (May 11-13, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Libraries; *Cost Effectiveness; *Gateway Systems; Higher Education; *Menu Driven Software; *Online Searching; Reference Services; Search Strategies
IDENTIFIERS *PRO SEARCH; *Software Evaluation

ABSTRACT

This presentation describes the features of the PRO-SEARCH front-end software package and how they can enhance online searching. The cost savings in terms of decreased connect time and convenience for the inexperienced searcher are discussed. The relationship between the quality of reference services and the effectiveness of using PRO-SEARCH in a small liberal arts college library is examined through the examples of the downloading feature and the accounting manager function of the software. Some limitations of the software are also mentioned. (Author/EW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED307882

USING PRO-SEARCH TO ENHANCE AN ONLINE SEARCHING SERVICE: ONE LIBRARY'S EXPERIENCE

Judith Arnold

Ursula Zyzik

Byrne Memorial Library

Saint Xavier College in Chicago

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Ursula Zyzik
Judith M. Arnold
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ABSTRACT

This presentation describes the features of the PRO-SEARCH front-end software package and how they can enhance online searching. The cost savings in terms of decreased connect time and the convenience for the inexperienced searcher are discussed. The relationship between the quality of reference services and the effectiveness of using PRO-SEARCH in a small liberal arts college library is examined through the examples of the downloading feature and the accounting manager function of the software. Some limitations of the software are also mentioned.

Since the introduction of microcomputers in libraries, regardless of size and type, the reference services have changed dramatically. More libraries are supplementing the traditional reference service based on locating relevant printed sources available in the library with computerized retrieval of information. It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the numerous advantages and some disadvantages of online searching, but rather how the process of online retrieval may be enhanced by the use of a specially designed front-end software, PRO-SEARCH, thus increasing the effectiveness and quality of a reference service.

IR053770

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The software has been successfully used for nearly two years in the Byrne Memorial Library at Saint Xavier College in Chicago. The Library serves both undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in various liberal arts studies. It is a medium-sized library offering a wide range of reference services to the college faculty, students, and staff. One of the reference services is online retrieval of information. The Library has always been a strong advocate of this element of library research realizing that budget considerations, actual research needs, and a particular mission of the College and Library made the acquisition of many of the printed materials and resources either impossible or unjustified. With the computerized retrieval of information the students at our college have equal opportunities in accessing the desired information faster, on time, and more effectively.

We, librarians, performing the searches try to ensure that the process of the retrieval of information with the help of the computer doesn't stop at its mechanical aspect but is also a fully educational process for the students. Therefore, we ask our students to be present during the online session and participate in the process of searching. Our observations and feedback from the students confirm to us that our approach is in the right direction.

It was one of the reasons why we purchased PRO-SEARCH, a front-end communication software package designed to make online retrieval easier and more cost-effective. We will address this issue in detail later. Secondly, PRO-SEARCH has become an integral part of our comprehensive bibliographic instruction program offered to our students. We strongly believe that the bibliographic instruction, which refers to teaching students not only the basic library mechanics but also

the intricacies of research methods related to their assignments, is a natural continuation of reference services provided by us on an everyday basis. Since computer retrieval of information is an integral part of the reference process in our library, the communication software enables us to demonstrate the search session during the bibliographic instruction with our complete control and at no additional cost.

PRO-SEARCH is a powerful front-end communication software package designed by Personal Bibliographic Software, Inc. and intended to simplify online searching on BRS and DIALOG while saving time and reducing costs of search sessions.

The hardware requirements include IBM PC or IBM compatibles or Texas Instruments Professional Computer with two double-sided disk drives or a fixed-disk drive with one double-sided diskette drive. The minimum memory requirements is 256 K RAM with PC-DOS.

The software is supported by several types of modems, including Hayes-Smartmodem.

Among many powerful features of the system, the most useful in our operations are:

a.) Automatic logon and logoff when the searcher doesn't need to repeat the time-consuming steps of entering the telephone numbers, passwords, and other check items with every logon. PRO-SEARCH automatically dials the phone, connects with the network, and enters the password with a single keystroke;

b.) The search can either be done with the help of menu-driven commands (a feature especially useful for beginning or inexperienced searchers) or in the so-called Native Mode when the searcher uses commands native of BRS, DIALOG, or any other system;

c.) Significant online time and, thus, costs can be saved by entering the search strategies offline and uploading them from the disk after logging on;

d.) Type-ahead feature is another cost saving device in the program. It allows the searcher to type ahead of BRS or DIALOG computers while the previous commands are still being processed;

e.) For those searchers who are experienced in one online system but do not feel quite comfortable in another the Emulation feature comes to their rescue. It allows them to search in a native mode one system, e.g., BRS, while using the command language of DIALOG, and vice versa. The software translates the commands of one system into another accurately and promptly. This feature, however, can be used only for those two online systems: BRS and DIALOG.

These special features contribute to a simplified online searching process, but using these as well as additional features, beyond streamlining searching and saving money, can result in enhanced reference service. Perhaps the greatest advantage that PRO-SEARCH offers is the control over the search process. The software manages routine tasks with automatic features such as automatic logon to the chosen vendor and an Accounting feature which records the costs for each search session. These two routines are easily activated with function keys. Because we consider online searching an extension of reference service, a learning experience, and part of the bibliographic instruction program, we perform most of our searches with the student present, and the search proceeds more smoothly due to these automatic steps. There is no need to safeguard a password or to worry about the different procedures

for connecting to different telecommunications networks. The searcher also has a sense of control and confidence, because as the search proceeds, the software automatically saves it in the buffer temporarily until the system is exited. After logoff the search may be reviewed with the student, scrolling back through the search on the monitor, and discussing it at leisure after the system is offline.

Besides the reviewing capabilities, a switch from DIALOG to BRS can be easily accomplished with the "Change Service" feature. This facilitates searching a variety of databases and encourages the searcher to use databases from both vendors. For example, a search on a literary topic can use the MLA Bibliography on DIALOG and then AHCI on BRS, all with little or no worry about logon and passwords.

These features are convenient, to be sure, but beyond convenience, they provide the searcher with a sense of confidence and control of the searching process. This feeling, in turn, produces a more relaxed searcher and a reference professional who can devote more attention to the actual search strategy and the student or faculty patron.

Another benefit is provided by the "Buffer Print" feature, which causes the search stored in the buffer to be printed. Cost savings can be realized by using this feature to print out the search after logoff; however, the greatest advantage of this feature is the capability of editing the search by marking the items to be printed before handing it to the student. Mistakes, detailed search strategies, descriptors, cost statements can be deleted, so that the copy handed to the student can contain only the relevant citations and information.

A "Buffer Save" feature allows downloading of the search stored in the buffer, which can then be manipulated if used with the software

packages Biblio-Link and Pro-Cite to produce the citations in custom-made bibliographies. This "Buffer Save" feature also facilitates preparing demonstration searches for bibliographic instruction programs. Before transfer to disk, the search saved in the buffer can be modified using a marking feature and simplified for instructional purposes by removing extraneous material in order to avoid an overly complicated presentation. Once this search is edited and saved, it can be recalled and used with the Kodak DataShow, equipment which projects the image from the monitor through an overhead projector to a screen. The entire saved search can be shown on the screen and can be paused to be an extremely effective teaching tool without incurring the online costs of a live demonstration. In addition, these downloaded searches can be recalled and printed to supply citations for other searches on similar topics.

The "Session" (or Accounting) feature also enhances reference service. An option of this feature is an itemized bill which is printed on the spot for the student and which details the charges for prints, telecommunications and connect time, and the databases and vendors used. This professional-appearing invoice presents a different perspective to the student--that of information as a commodity, which, in turn, leads to a new respect for information and a more serious approach to information retrieval. Likewise, the personalized cover sheet, which can be printed for each search, promotes a professional image. This sheet is most helpful for those times when the client cannot be present. It provides space for a message, supplies the date, topic of the search, and the searcher's and client's names.

The Accounting feature also supplies monthly statistics on use--a detailing of departments, databases, searchers, and costs. This data aids analysis of who uses the service and average costs, but equally important, it reveals who does not use the service, and, therefore, which departments need to have searching promoted to them.

In summary, the chief benefits of PRO-SEARCH for our library have not proved to be the cost-saving aspects but have been the resulting enhancements to our reference service. PRO-SEARCH provides us control over the online searching process which, in turn, allows us to serve the patron more effectively and supplies us with options that promote a new respect for information and the professionals who manage it.